Far-right leader Robinson cleared of terror offence

LONDON: A UK judge on Tuesday cleared far-right activist Tommy Robinson of a terrorism offence after he refused to let police access his phone last year, in his latest high-profile criminal case.

Judge Sam Goozee ruled that officers might have unlawfully targeted Robinson over what he "stood for" and his "beliefs" at the Channel Tunnel shuttle port in Folkestone, southeast England, in July 2024.

Robinson, who drew around 150,000 people onto London's streets in September for one of the country's largest far-right protests ever, called the verdict "damning".

The 42-year-old, a highly contentious figure in Britain who boasts a significant online following alongside a string of criminal convictions, also thanked US billionaire Elon Musk. He has said Musk, who controversially addressed his September rally, picked up his legal bill.

"That judge's verdict is a slamdown against the police," Robinson — whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon — said outside Westminster Magistrates' Court in London. Counter-terror police said they initially detained Robinson over "concerns over his travel arrangements" and because the silver Bentley he was driving was not registered to him, the court heard.

Robinson, who was en route to Spain, also gave "vague and short" answers, and then refused to provide the PIN to his mobile phone, which is required under anti-terror laws.—AFP

Experts say Europe doesn't have enough troops to fight Russia

PARIS: Europe could struggle to mobilise enough troops or quickly produce enough weapons in case of a direct confrontation with Russia, a new report warned on Tuesday.

The French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), a top think tank, highlighted Europe's weaknesses in the event of a high-intensity conflict with Russia, which the authors describe as "a long-term threat".

Europe needs to demonstrate political will and "a coherent defence economic strategy" to prepare for a possible confrontation with Russia over the next five years, said the report titled "Europe-Russia: Balance of Power Review".

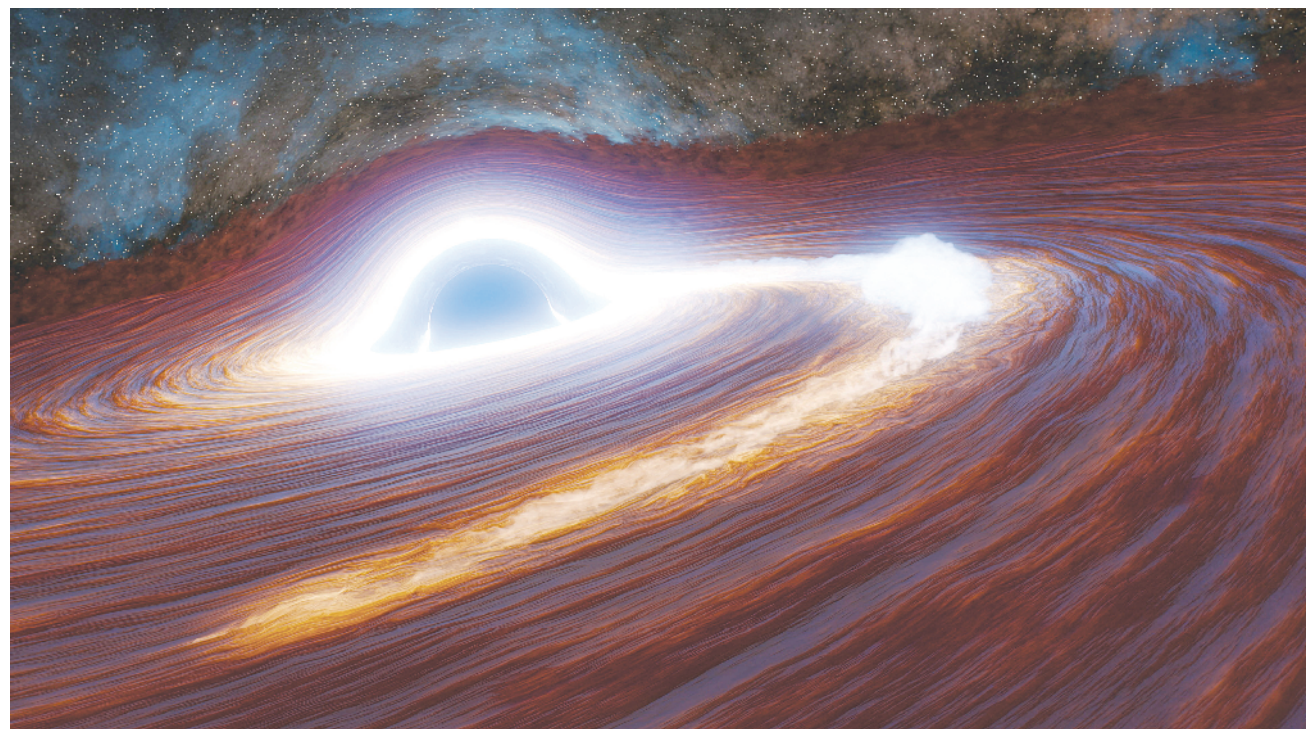
Thomas Gomart, the IFRI director, said it was important to "identify our strengths and weaknesses", pointing to Europe's "critical military gaps".

"European countries have the necessary potential, that is the economic resources, military capabilities and technological know-how to stand up to Russia by 2030, provided — and this is obviously the most important word — that they demonstrate political will," he said.

European countries have upped military spending in a bid to contain Russia since Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in Feb 2022.

Last month, Fabien Mandon, France's chief of the defence staff, said the country must be ready in the next three or four years for a clash with Russia, which "may be tempted to continue the war on our continent".

Although Europe enjoys an advantage over Russia in aerospace and at sea, its land forces suffer from "critical shortfalls in depth and ammunition stockpiles", the report said. —AFP



AN artist's impression shows a star, with a mass at least 30 times that of the Sun, being shredded in a phenomenon called a tidal disruption event after it strayed too close to a supermassive black hole.—Reuters

Star-eating black hole unleashes record-setting energetic flare

Researchers believe the star may have gone too close to the black hole after interaction with another object in neighbourhood

WASHINGTON: Scientists are observing the most energetic flare ever seen emanating from a supermassive black hole, apparently caused when this celestial beast shredded and swallowed a huge star that strayed too close.

The researchers said the flare at its peak was 10 trillion times brighter than the sun. It was unleashed by a black hole roughly 300 million times the mass of the sun residing inside a faraway galaxy, about 11 billion light-years from Earth. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects with gravitational pull so strong that not even light can escape. Most galaxies are thought to have one at their centre. The black hole in this research is extremely massive — more so, for instance, than the one at the centre of our Milky Way that possesses roughly four million times the mass of the sun.

The researchers said the most likely explanation for the flare is a large star being pulled into the black hole. As material from the ill-fated star falls inward, it causes a flare of energy when it reaches the black hole's point of no return.

The researchers believe the star was at least 30 times, and perhaps up to 200 times, the mass of the sun. It may have been part of a population of stars orbiting in the vicinity of the black hole and somehow was sent too close through some interaction with another object in the neighbourhood, the researchers said.

"It seems reasonable that it was involved in a collision with another more massive body in its original orbit around the supermassive black hole which essentially knocked it in," said Caltech astronomer Matthew Graham, lead author of the study published on Tuesday in the journal *Nature Astronomy*.

Star 'spaghettified'

"It was put on a much more elliptical orbit, which brought it much closer to the supermassive black hole at its closest pass — too close, it turns out," Graham added.

Supermassive black holes are surrounded by a disk of gas and dust being drawn inward after being caught by their gravitational strength.

"However it happened, the star wandered close enough to the supermassive black hole that it was 'spaghettified' — that is, stretched out to become long and thin, due to the gravity of the supermassive black hole strengthening as you get very close to it. That material then spiraled around the supermassive black hole as it fell in," said astronomer and study co-author K.E. Saavik Ford of City University of New York Borough of Manhattan Community College and Graduate Centre.

The flare would be the result of the gas from the shredded star heating up and shining as it falls into oblivion. The star thought to be involved was unusually massive.

"Stars this massive are spectacularly rare both because smaller stars are born more often than massive ones, and because very massive stars live very short lives," Ford said.

The researchers suspect that stars that orbit near a supermassive black hole can increase in mass by attracting some of the material swirling around the black hole, making them abnormally large.

The researchers observed the flare using telescopes in California, Arizona and Hawaii. They considered other possible causes such as a star exploding at the end of its lifetime, a jet of material streaming outward from the black hole or a phenomenon called gravitational lensing that could have made a fainter event look more powerful. None of these scenarios fit the data.

Because of the time it takes for light to travel, when astronomers observe faraway events like this they are looking back in time to an earlier epoch of the universe. —Reuters

Jesus, not Mary, saved the world, says Vatican

VATICAN CITY: Jesus may have heard words of wisdom from his mother Mary, but she did not help him save the world from damnation, the Vatican said on Tuesday.

In a new decree approved by Pope Leo, the Vatican's top doctrinal office instructed the world's 1.4 billion Catholics not to refer to Mary as the "co-redeemer" of the world.

Jesus alone saved the world, said the new instruction, settling an internal debate that had befuddled senior Church figures for decades, and even sparked rare open disagreement among recent popes.

"It would not be appropriate to use the title 'co-redemptrix'," said the text. "This title ... (can) create confusion and an imbalance in the harmony of the truths of the Christian faith."

Catholics believe Jesus redeemed humanity by his crucifixion and death. Church scholars have debated for centuries whether Mary, who Catholics and many Christians call the Mother of God, helped Jesus save the world.

The late Pope Francis fiercely opposed granting Mary the title of "co-redeemer", at one point calling the idea "foolishness". "She never wanted to take anything for herself from her son," Pope Francis, who died in April, said in 2019.

Pope Francis' predecessor, Benedict XVI, also opposed the title.

His predecessor, John Paul II, supported it, but stopped using the title publicly in the mid-1990s after the doctrinal office began expressing scepticism.

The new Vatican instruction highlighted Mary's role as an intermediary between God and humanity. By giving birth to Jesus, she "opened the gates of the Redemption that all humanity had awaited", it said.

According to the Bible, Mary's response to the angel who told her she would become pregnant was: "Let it be." —Reuters

World on track to dangerous warming, says UN

PARIS: National commitments to slash heat-trapping pollution would limit global warming up to 2.5C this century — nowhere near enough to avoid devastating climate impacts despite a sweep of new pledges, the UN warned on Tuesday.

Scientists are in broad agreement that warming above 1.5C relative to pre-industrial times risks catastrophic consequences, and every effort must be made to stick as close as possible to this safer threshold. But the world is set to blow past 1.5C in a matter of years and planet-warming emissions keep rising, hitting a new record high in 2024, according to a report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

The sobering assessment was published just days before world leaders gather in Brazil on Thursday and Friday ahead of the COP30 climate summit in the rainforest city of Belem. With an overshoot of 1.5C now inevitable, focus has shifted to how quickly temperatures can be returned to less-risky levels.

"Our mission is simple, but not easy: make any overshoot as small and as short as possible," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday at the launch of UNEP's Emissions Gap report.

Big polluters most responsible for the crisis have been urged to pledge faster and deeper emissions cuts to bend the curve back to 1.5C by the end of the century.

Instead, the latest round of carbon-cutting targets announced ahead of the UN climate talks "have barely moved the needle", concluded UNEP's latest assessment.

"Ambition and action are nowhere near the levels needed globally or collectively," Anne Olhoff, the report's chief scientific editor, said. The latest assessment projects that the world's collective commitments to tackle climate change, if enacted in full, would result in 2.3C to 2.5C of warming by 2100.

That poses an unacceptable threat to the survival of nations most at risk by rising seas and extreme weather, and the global failure to rise to this challenge will loom over COP30. Scientists have strong evidence that warming above 1.5C — let alone a degree or more — increases not only the intensity of hurricanes, floods and other disasters, but the likelihood of catastrophic climate tipping points.

At 1.4C above pre-industrial times, the Earth is already too warm for most tropical coral reefs to survive, while ice sheets and the Amazon rainforest could suffer severe and lasting changes below 2C, with consequences for the entire planet. Under the Paris Agreement, each round of climate pledges is supposed to be more ambitious than the last to keep long-term warming "well below" 2C and as close as possible to 1.5C.

Despite being obligated to do so, only around one-third of countries announced a 2035 emissions reduction target by September 30, UNEP said.

This year's warming projections are 0.3C lower than last year, but Olhoff said little of that reduction was thanks to these latest pledges. Updates to methodology accounted for 0.1C while another 0.1C was attributed to US commitments made under the Biden administration.

These gains are unlikely to materialise as President Donald Trump has vowed to pull the United States out of the Paris accord and ditch the climate policies of his predecessor.—AFP

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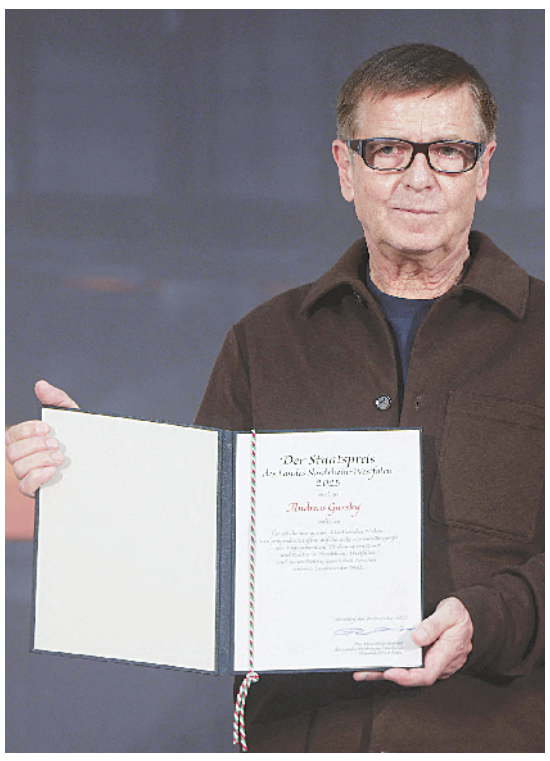

DUESSELDORF: Andreas Gursky poses with his certificate after the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia conferred its highest award on the photographer.—AFP

SYDNEY: A woman walks past a model submarine on display at the BAE Systems stand on the first day of the Indo-Pacific International Maritime Exposition.—Reuters

SIR David Beckham with his wife Lady Victoria after he was made a Knight Bachelor at an investiture ceremony.—Reuters

Football star David Beckham hails knighthood as 'proudest moment'

LONDON: Former England football captain David Beckham on Tuesday received his knighthood from King Charles III at Windsor Castle, calling it his "proudest moment".

The football star, 50, who played 115 times for England as well as for some of the world's most high-profile clubs, including Manchester United and Real Madrid, was knighted for services to sport and charity. Beckham said it was "quite a moment" for a boy from the east end of London to be "here at Windsor Castle, being honoured by His Majesty the King — the most important and the most respected institution in the world".

"This is without doubt my proudest moment," he said.

Beckham, known as a stylish dresser, wore a grey suit made by his pop star-turned fashion designer wife, Victoria.

She accompanied him to the ceremony at Windsor, west of London, along with his parents, Ted and Sandra.

Beckham has been known as "Sir David" since the honour was announced in June, while Victoria, a former member of the Spice Girls, became "Lady Beckham".

Asked whether he managed to speak to Charles during the ceremony, Beckham said Charles had been "quite impressed with my suit".

Beckham added that receiving the honour was particularly special for him as he had "always been a huge fan of the monarchy".

"I've been very obviously lucky in my career to have won what I've won and done what I've done, but to receive an honour like this, of a knight, is beyond anything that I ever thought that I would receive," he said.—AFP

CAIRO: Thousands of visitors streamed through the Grand Egyptian Museum on Tuesday as almost the entire collection of King Tutankhamun's treasures — over 4,500 artefacts — was displayed together for the first time since the young pharaoh's tomb was discovered in 1922.—Reuters

MOSCOW: Russia's President Vladimir Putin meets religious leaders and members of youth organisations on Red Square during National Unity Day celebrations.—Reuters